

~~SECRET NOFORN~~NIO/EUR
9 December 1986KINNOCK ON THE DEFENSIVE

Labor candidate Neil Kinnock suffered a serious loss of face during his recent visit to the US. British critics -- including Labor moderates -- are belatedly worrying about the potential damage to the special relationship of his unilateralist disarmament policies. In short, the pressure is rising for him to backtrack -- a step which would raise howls from the left and be equally divisive. He may hope that his next official visit to the US early in 1987 will help him recoup.

Kinnock's reception here left little credibility for his evasive line that Labor would actually be strengthening the Alliance by quitting Britain's nuclear deterrent role and banning nuclear weapons at US bases. That line, which sprouted in the hothouse atmosphere of Labor skull sessions, got a killing frost in the US. And his thinly veiled threats of closing US bases in the event of a strong negative US reaction to such policies heightened concerns in the UK that he is on a radical, uncharted course.

The tactical advantage for now is swinging to the Tories.

- Mrs. Thatcher already made gains earlier this fall when the Alliance lost its bearings over security issues.
- She is benefitting from her masterful display at Camp David of her growing influence in Washington and in major NATO capitals. (By contrast, Kinnock even took heat from liberal Democrats here.)

She might use a protracted squabble in Labor ranks to call early elections.

If, as is likely, Labor shirks from a serious policy revamping, it may try new wrapping for the same policies. If so, Kinnock will probably test the new moderate-sounding line during his official US visit in early 1987.

- He may hope for a warmer reception which would reduce the visibility of his disarmament weakness while he builds momentum against the Tories on economic issues.
- Failing that kind of reception, he may dramatize his confrontation of views with the Administration.

25X1
25X1

To the extent Kinnock continues to receive a cool but correct reception in the US -- with unified and firm opposition to his security program -- he will be less able to find a way out of his current deadend.

~~SECRET NOFORN~~